

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03  
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SAJ-01  
TRSE-00 EB-08 OMB-01 /068 W  
-----241355 027142 /45

R 241307Z FEB 77  
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0005  
INFO AMCONSUL BORDEAUX  
AMCONSUL LYON  
AMCONSUL MARSEILLE  
AMCONSUL NICE  
AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 05470

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PINT, FR  
SUBJECT: ELECTORAL IMPRESSIONS FROM THE PROVINCES

REF: (A) PARIS 5147, (B) 76 PARIS 37798

SUMMARY. THE FOLLOWING IS AN IMPRESSIONISTIC REPORT OF  
THE CURRENT ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN OBTAINED DURING VISITS  
TO LARGE CITIES (BORDEAUX, MARSEILLE AND STRASBOURG)  
AND SMALL TOWNS, IN THE PROVINCES AND IN THE PARIS  
REGION. WHILE RANDOM, THESE VISITS CONFIRM MANY OF THE  
VIEWS WE HAVE REPORTED IN THE ABOVE CABLES AND IN RECENT  
MONTHS, NAMELY:

-- THAT THE LEFT STANDS TO MAKE SUBSTANTIAL GAINS  
IN THE MORE IMPORTANT CITIES OVER 30,000  
POPULATION;  
-- THAT CHIRAC'S RPR AND THE BARRE PLAN WILL HELP  
MAJORITY CANDIDATES ONLY marginally;  
-- THAT PRIME MINISTER BARRE, WHO HAD FORTUITOUSLY  
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COME TO POWER DURING THE CAMPAIGN PERIOD, HAS  
INCREASINGLY WON THE RESPECT OF MUCH OF THE  
FRENCH PUBLIC;  
-- THAT THE RESULTS OF THE MUNICIPALS COULD BE  
SPOTTY ENOUGH TO ENABLE THE MAJORITY TO  
RATIONALIZE THAT 1978 CAN BE STILL SAVED. END  
SUMMARY.

1. BACKGROUND: OF THE 220 CITIES WITH A POPULATION OF OVER 30,000 IN 1971, 118 HAVE A MAYOR AND MUNICIPAL COUNCIL FROM THE MAJORITY PARTIES AND 102 BELONG TO THE OPPOSITION. THE MOST IMPORTANT CITIES IN THE MAJORITY CAMP ARE TOULOUSE, LYON, NICE, TOURS, NANCY, METZ, ROUEN, SAINT-ETIENNE, TOULON, BORDEAUX, MONTPELLIER, BREST AND RENNES. OF CITIES HELD BY THE OPPOSITION, THE PCF RULES 52 CITY HALLS (LE HAVRE, AMIENS AND NIMES ARE THE LARGEST), MAINLY IN THE SUBURBS OF PARIS AND IN THE SOUTH; THE PS HOLDS TWO LESS THAN THE PCF, BUT MOST OF THE LARGER CITIES (MARSEILLE, LILLE, GRENOBLE, CLERMONT-FERRAND, SAINT-NAZAIRE, PERPIGNAN AND LIMOGES). HOWEVER, IN SOME OF THIS LATTER GROUP, THE PS OWES ITS CONTROL MORE OFTEN TO ALLIANCES WITH MODERATES OR CENTRISTS (WHO WERE IN THE OPPOSITION IN 1971) THAN WITH THE PCF.

2. MANY OF THESE 220 CITIES WHICH DIVIDED MORE OR LESS EVENLY IN 1971 HAVE INDICATED A DIFFERENT VOTING TREND SINCE THEN, MOST RECENTLY DURING THE 1974 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. 160 VOTED THE SAME WAY AS THEY DID THREE YEARS BEFORE; THAT IS, MAJORITY CITIES VOTING FOR GISCARD (STRASBOURG, NEUILLY) OR OPPOSITION CITIES FOR MITTERRAND (SAINT-NAZAIRE, MONTREUIL). ONE CAN EXPECT, A PRIORI, A CERTAIN STABILITY IN THESE CITIES. IN THE 60 OTHER CITIES, THE VOTING WAS NOT CONSISTENT OVER THE THREE-YEAR PERIOD, AND WE CAN EXPECT A GREATER NUMBER OF MAYORALTY CHANGES HERE. OF THESE 60 MUNICIPALITIES

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(25 PERCENT OF THE TOTAL), ONLY 17 ARE OPPOSITION, THE REMAINING 43 MAJORITY. ON PAPER, THEREFORE, THE MAJORITY PARTIES ARE RUNNING A FAR GREATER RISK OF LOSING CITY HALLS THAN THE PS/PCF/MRG ALLIANCE. THEY ARE TRYING TO RUN AGAINST THE TIDE IN 2 1/2 TIMES AS MANY CITIES AS THE OPPOSITION. FINALLY, THE PS APPEARS TO BE BETTER PLACED THAN THE PCF TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE MAJORITY'S WEAK POSITION; A POLL HAS INDICATED THE PS IS THE MORE DANGEROUS RIVAL IN 34 OF THESE 43 CITIES, THE PCF THE MORE DANGEROUS IN THE REMAINING 9.

3. THE PS TIDE: WHAT ARE THE REASONS FOR THE LEFT'S, ESPECIALLY THE PS, STRENGTH? PERCEPTIONS OBVIOUSLY DIFFER DEPENDING ON THE CITY, REGION AND PEOPLE SPOKEN TO. JEAN LEGENDRE IN COMPIEGNE, GIVEN HIS FORCEFUL LEADERSHIP AND POPULARITY DURING HIS 20-YEAR REIGN, SHOULD WIN, PERHAPS EVEN IN THE FIRST ROUND, DESPITE THE FACT THAT MANY OF HIS MAJORITY COLLEAGUES IN THE AREA ARE SERIOUSLY THREATENED BY THE UNITED LEFT CAN-

DIDATES. SO SHOULD PIERRE PFLIMLIN IN STRASBOURG, WHERE

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TRSE-00 EB-08 OMB-01 /068 W  
-----241355 027250 /45

R 241307Z FEB 77  
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0006  
INFO AMCONSUL BORDEAUX  
AMCONSUL LYON  
AMCONSUL MARSEILLE  
AMCONSUL NICE  
AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

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THE LEFT'S VOTE COULD GO FROM AN INSIGNIFICANT FIGURE IN 1971 TO 40 PERCENT NEXT MONTH. NEVERTHELESS, AND AT THE RISK OF GROSSLY GENERALIZING, ONE HAS THE FEELING OF AN IRRESISTIBLY RISING TIDE IN FAVOR OF THE PS AND THE UNITED LEFT LIST WHERE THE LEFT HAS REACHED AN INTERNAL AGREEMENT. THIS STATE OF PLAY, IF IT IS TRUE, IS DUE TO HARD AND STEADY WORK BY THE PS AT THE FEDERATION LEVEL. TIME AND AGAIN ONE MEETS YOUNG (25-40 YEAR OLD) PS CANDIDATES, FORMER TEACHERS OR PROFESSIONAL PEOPLE WHO HAVE DECIDED SOME TIME OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS TO GO INTO POLITICS OUT OF DISSATISFACTION WITH THE ACTUAL GOVERNMENT AND A DESIRE TO CHANGE THEIR SOCIETY. FIVE YEARS OF ORGANIZATION AND WORK AT THE GRASS ROOTS ARE NOW PAYING THEIR DIVIDENDS. THIS MISSIONARY WORK IS BEING CARRIED OUT FAIRLY UNIFORMLY AROUND THE COUNTRY, IN AREAS CONSIDERED BASTIONS OF CONSERVATISM (BRITTANY, ALSACE) AND IN AREAS OF SOCIOLOGICAL CHANGE. PS ORGANIZATIONAL WORK HAS BEEN STRONGEST AND ACHIEVED THE  
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MOST SUCCESS IN AREAS MARKED BY CONTINUED MIGRATION FROM THE COUNTRYSIDE TO THE CITY, UNIONIZATION, WHITE-COLLAR JOBS, NEW TOWNS, ETC. DROP-OUTS AMONG PS MAYORS DUE TO THE ALLIANCE WITH THE PCF ARE RARE. PERHAPS 90 TO 95 PERCENT OF THEM HAVE RECONCILED THEMSELVES SINCE THE SIGNING OF THE COMMON PROGRAM IN 1972 TO THE FACT OF THE ALLIANCE, THAT SUCH AN ALLIANCE WAS THE BEST WAY TO GET ELECTED AND THAT THE LEFT WOULD DO BETTER TO HAVE THE PCF INSIDE THE HOUSE THAN OUT IN THE STREETS. THE UNEASINESS OF MANY PS MAYORS WITH THE ALLIANCE WITH THE PCF HAS NOT BEEN ENOUGH TO OVERCOME THESE ARGUMENTS.

4. THE CHIRAC FACTOR: OUTSIDE OF PARIS THE UDR/RPR, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS OFTEN REPRESENTED BY MAYORS AND DEPUTIES A GOOD GENERATION OLDER THAN THEIR PS RIVALS. THEIR PROBLEM IS EITHER ONE OF TRYING TO ATTRACT THE VOTES OF THE YOUNGER ELECTORATE (18 YEAR OLDS WILL VOTE FOR MAYORS FOR THE FIRST TIME) OR FINDING A YOUNGER CANDIDATE TO APPEAL TO THIS ELECTORATE. BY AND LARGE, WITH SOME NOTABLE EXCEPTIONS, THESE PROVINCIAL RPR POLITICIANS ARE SUCCEEDING IN NEITHER; THEY WERE SWEEPED INTO POWER IN THE AFTERMATH OF MAY 1968, WITH THE BACKING OF SUCH NATIONAL FIGURES AS DE GAULLE AND POMPIDOU, AND HAVE NEGLECTED TO GIVE THE SAME DAILY ATTENTION TO GRASS-ROOTS ORGANIZATION THAT THEIR OPPOSITION RIVALS HAVE. CENTRIST AND IR POLITICIANS HAVE THE ADDED HANDICAP OF VERY WEAK NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS TO COME TO THEIR HELP. HAS CHIRAC'S RPR TURNED AROUND THE SITUATION? ONLY SLIGHTLY, ACCORDING TO THEIR CANDIDATES IN THE FIELD. IT IS TRUE THAT LOCAL RPR LEADERS POINT TO INCREASING PARTY MEMBERSHIP IN HIS DISTRICT SINCE LAST DECEMBER 5 AND THAT, IN TERMS OF CARD-CARRYING MEMBERS, THE RPR HAS PASSED THE PS AND IS CATCHING UP TO THE PCF. BUT THESE NEW MEMBERS SEEM TO BE DRAWN MAINLY FROM ABSTINEES AND OTHER MAJORITY PARTIES RATHER THAN THE LEFT, WITH LITTLE NET GAIN FOR THE MAJORITY AS A WHOLE. THE RPR

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NATIONAL MOVEMENT NEEDS MORE TIME TO PERCOLATE DOWN TO THE LOCAL LEVEL, AND ONE MONTH IS NOT ENOUGH TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL. FOR THE MOMENT, CHIRAC'S INFLUENCE SEEMS TO BE MAINLY FELT IN PARIS AND HIS ACTION FOCUSED MORE ON HIM AS A PERSONALITY THAN ON THE MOVEMENT AT LARGE.

5. THE BARRE FACTOR: THE PROBLEMS OF THE ECONOMY ARE AS REAL AND VISIBLE IN THE CITIES AS CHIRAC'S INFLUENCE

IS AMBIGUOUS. EVERY MAYOR WORRIES ABOUT INCREASED UNEMPLOYMENT AMONG HIS MOST URGENT PROBLEMS. WHILE THE PRIME MINISTER HAS NOT YET BROUGHT ANY SOLUTION TO THIS PROBLEM, HE IS SEEN AS SOMEONE WHO IS BEGINNING TO SET FRANCE'S ECONOMY BACK ON THE RIGHT RAILS. IN THIS SENSE THE BARRE PLAN IS CONSIDERED A PLUS BY MAJORITY CANDIDATES. IT IS FAR FROM A SAVE ALL, BUT EVERY LITTLE BIT COUNTS FOR THEM. IN ADDITION, BARRE HIMSELF HAS BECOME A POLITICAL FACTOR TO BE RECKONED WITH, HIS POPULARITY HAS SOARED IN RECENT WEEKS AND NOW PEOPLE EVEN TALK ABOUT HIM (PREMATURELY) AS A FUTURE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE. WHATEVER HIS FUTURE, HE IS BUILDING A REPUTATION AS A MAN WHO KNOWS HOW TO SAY NO, A MAN WHO IS NOT BEHOLDEN TO ANY PARTY AND ONE WHO CONCENTRATES ON THE HEART OF THE PROBLEM RATHER THAN THE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERICS. ALL THIS IS IN STRIKING CONTRAST TO GISCARD'S SUPPOSEDLY LOOSE REIGN OF GOVERNMENT AND WEAK LEADERSHIP. BARRE THUS IS BECOMING A COUNTERWEIGHT TO CHIRAC, WHO HAS BEEN TRYING TO PRESENT HIMSELF AS THE DYNAMIC, DECISIVE HARD-CHARGER NEEDED TO MEET THE LEFT'S CHALLENGE. IT IS TOO EARLY AND PERHAPS IRRELEVANT TO PREDICT WHO, BETWEEN CHIRAC AND BARRE, WILL EVENTUALLY

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R 241307Z FEB 77  
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS  
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INFO AMCONSUL BORDEAUX  
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FILL THE LEADERSHIP VOID NOW FELT BY MANY PEOPLE. IN FACT, THERE MAY BE PLENTY OF ROOM ON THE POLITICAL SCENE FOR BOTH TO DO SO. WHAT IS MORE RELEVANT IS TO ASK WHETHER BARRE (AND CHIRAC) WILL BE OF ANY APPRECIABLE HELP TO THE MAJORITY IN NEXT MONTH'S ELECTION. AND HERE THE ANSWER IS A DISAPPOINTING "ONLY MARGINAL". AS WITH CHIRAC'S RPR, BARRE'S RISE HAS BEEN TOO RECENT FOR THE RIPPLE THEORY TO TAKE EFFECT.

6. CONCLUSION: IT IS ONLY TO BE EXPECTED THAT THE MAJORITY SUFFER LOSSES NEXT MONTH, GIVEN ITS UNUSUALLY GOOD SCORE IN 1971, WHEN IT HAD POMPIDOU BEHIND IT AND GAULLISM FRESH IN THE PUBLIC MIND. IN ADDITION, MUNICIPALITIES TRADITIONALLY VOTE LEFT OR CENTER-LEFT IN FRANCE, SO THIS YEAR WILL SIMPLY SEE THE POLITICAL PENDULUM SWING LEFT OF CENTER ONCE AGAIN. FOR ALL THAT, MAJORITY LEADERS ARE NOT GIVING UP OR CONCEDING A SINGLE CONTEST TO THE LEFT. THEY ARE USING EVERY CARD THEY

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HAVE, CHIRAC AND BARRE INCLUDED, BUT ALL THESE WILL PROBABLY NOT BE ENOUGH TO STEM THE LEFT TIDE. THE MAJORITY'S SAVING GRACE MAY BE THAT THE RESULTS WILL BE AMBIGUOUS ENOUGH WITH RESPECT TO REGIONAL TRENDS TO FUDGE ANY FIRM GENERAL CONCLUSIONS FOR THE FUTURE. IN ADDITION, EVEN THOUGH THESE ELECTIONS ARE MORE POLITICIZED THAN THEY HAVE EVER BEEN, PARTICULARLY IN LARGE CITIES, THEY ARE MOSTLY BEING FOUGHT OVER LOCAL ISSUES AND PERSONALITIES RATHER THAN LEFT VERSUS RIGHT. BOTH THESE FACTORS MAY ALLOW THE MAJORITY TO SWALLOW ITS LOSSES WITH INGENIOUS RATIONALIZATIONS IN HOPES THAT THE BARRE PLAN AND THE RPR WILL TAKE HOLD BY SPRING 1978.  
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